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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

15 February 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CONSULTANTS ON NATIONAL ESTIMATES

SUBJECT: A Critique of the NIE's on the USSR

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Work should begin immediately to extend NIE-25, Probable Soviet Courses of Action to Mid-1952 (2 August 1951), through the end of 1952. This paper is of such significance that it should have the highest priority, but it should also benefit to the highest degree possible from a thorough and basic analysis of Soviet capabilities and intentions, a longer paper covering an extended period which will require more time and research than the revision.

2. O/NE should prepare and publish a thorough, critical estimate of Soviet capabilities and intentions for the crucial period from 1952 through approximately 1955, when it is now estimated that the West will be able to match Soviet military strength. This paper should deal with Soviet ultimate objectives and the objectives for the extended period covered by this estimate; Soviet capabilities, particularly as affected by political, economic, scientific, and military developments within and beyond the borders of the USSR; the Soviet estimate of the world situation and probable Soviet courses of action.

3. More consideration should be given in our estimates to political and economic factors affecting Soviet military capabilities and probable Soviet courses of action. The staff members of O/NE should work more closely with the Agency working groups and should stimulate them to an intensive re-examination of the basic estimates concerning Soviet capabilities.

II. A CRITIQUE OF THE NIE'S ON THE USSR

4. I have just completed a study of all of the NIE's dealing directly with the USSR and its European Satellites and of the entire file of con-

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tributions, memoranda, drafts, etc., which led to the final version of NIE-25. This analysis led me to several conclusions, which I offer as suggestions for improving a series of proven high quality.

5. Our estimates almost always in their discussion of Soviet objectives omit the Soviet rulers' first and most important objective, that of preserving their control over the USSR. This omission leads the reader easily to assume that the Soviet leaders are trigger-happy militarists anxious to plunge their empire into general war. It ignores both the caution demonstrated throughout Soviet history by Soviet leaders in their foreign policy and the fundamental reasons for that caution. A description of the Kremlin's vast objectives, followed by an account of imposing Soviet military capabilities, leads the reader to assume that the leaders of the USSR place more reliance upon the use of military force than they probably do. This appreciation conceals the fact the military force is only one arm of the Kremlin, blinds the reader to the other effective techniques the Kremlin has at its disposal, and it blurs the Kremlin's skill, resourcefulness, and flexibility in timing its operations.

6. The NIE's generally place far more emphasis upon the purely military elements of the current situation than seems warranted, and slight the Soviet political and economic situation. Our estimates often treat Soviet military capabilities as though they were in a vacuum. NIE-25, for example, began with a section on Soviet objectives and followed this with a section on military considerations underlying Soviet action. The apparent error involved in this heavy emphasis on the military aspects is particularly important because the economic data frequently contradicts or seriously challenges available information concerning Soviet military preparations. The economic indicators in the unpublished indicator section of NIE-48, for example, quite effectively cancelled out the military ones.

7. Most NIE's, including NIE-25, handle the current crisis as though the process of political, economic, and military polarization had reached a very advanced stage. The West is described as though it included the entire non-Soviet world, and the enormous and significant areas which are not yet parts of either Bloc are ignored.

8. It is obvious, from a study of the NIE-25 contributions and of the contributions of the Agencies to other NIE's, that these papers provide inadequate information and often are carelessly and uncritically prepared. I believe that closer working arrangements between the O/NE staff and the working groups of the Agencies would improve the contributions and perhaps also serve to educate everyone concerning the character and quantity of the evidence available concerning the USSR. Such arrangements might also stimulate the injection of an increased quantity of fact into the draft estimates and reduce the amount of compromise always introduced into the

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estimate before it is published. In this connection, it was interesting to note that the contributions produced very little helpful data, but that each successive draft of the estimate showed less connection with that evidence which was available.

9. Several figures and estimates recur constantly throughout all intelligence papers dealing with the USSR, including some NIE's, and have been allowed to acquire a certain sanctity. The uncritical use of hallowed expressions constitutes a serious hazard in intelligence, which O/NE should seek to eliminate. Among the most important standard estimates which must be thoroughly and critically examined are the following:

a. That the Soviet armed forces have the capability simultaneously of overrunning continental Europe and most of the Near and Middle East, neutralizing or occupying the UK, attacking the US with mass weapons, and conducting an effective defense against air attack. This may be true, but it has been said so often that it needs a thorough re-examination.

b. That the Soviet forces are in a state of immediate war readiness and could attack in all directions with little or no advance notice.

c. That Soviet fear of American atomic counter-attack is the principal deterrent against Soviet aggression. The apparent assumptions have always been:

i. That, should the USSR initiate general war, someone would push a button and Moscow would disappear.

ii. That the Soviet estimate here is identical with our own.

In view of new data on Soviet electronic research and development, Soviet aircraft capabilities and aircraft production estimates, the Soviet stockpile and dispersal program, and the presumably growing possibility that the USSR may be able to parry our counter-attack and seriously to damage our military potential, this entire estimate should be carefully surveyed again.

d. That the Soviet Army is composed of 3,000,000 men organized into 175 divisions, that the Soviet Air Force has 20,000 planes, etc. A sample check of some of the accepted figures, which have been repeated so often that they are sacred and that no one questions the methods by which they were derived, reveals that our estimates of such critical items as: Soviet ground force strength, Soviet aircraft production, the size of Soviet forces stationed in Eastern Germany, the size of the Satellite armies, etc., are extremely fragile. The flimsy character of the evidence is forgotten the more often the estimates are repeated.

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III. THE REVISION OF NIE-25

10. Analysis of NIE-25, Probable Soviet Courses of Action to Mid-1952 (2 August 1951), indicates that this estimate must now be revised and extended through 1952. Any estimate dealing with as complex and fluid a series of problems as Soviet capabilities, intentions, and probable courses of action over a period of 12 months would necessarily become obsolete, though much of the NIE-25 analysis of the international situation and many of its estimates remain valid. Since NIE-25 was published, for example, there has been further deterioration of the Western position in the Middle East (Egypt was not mentioned, there is now almost no likelihood that the British will use military force in Iran, etc.), the likelihood of invasion of Yugoslavia, Greece, or Turkey has become considerably less, Titoism has evaporated further as a menace to Soviet control of the Satellites and of the international Communist movement, there has been some increase in Western resolution and military strength in Western Europe, although political and economic problems are becoming more apparent and more serious, etc.

11. The nature of the current world situation and the importance of an estimate on probable Soviet courses of action demonstrate that we should probably not attempt to extend such an estimate beyond a period of six months and that this problem should be reviewed at least semi-annually. A study limited specifically to a period of six months should benefit from more direct concentration upon immediate Soviet objectives and probable Soviet tactics to attain those objectives.

IV. SOVIET CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS

12. I believe that CIA and the intelligence business in general need a full, critical view of the capabilities of the USSR and of the Soviet view of the world situation. O/NIE should, therefore, prepare and publish a thorough, critical estimate of Soviet capabilities and intentions, with an emphasis upon current and potential capabilities. This basic estimate should cover the period from 1952 through 1955, the date at which it is now estimated that the West will attain a position of military parity with the Soviet Bloc. After this estimate has been completed, it might be extremely useful to attempt an estimate of Soviet capabilities for an even more extended period, such as 15 or 20 years.

13. The estimate of Soviet capabilities and intentions through 1955 should define and attempt to resolve the basic intelligence problems facing us, particularly those of current Soviet capabilities and the Soviet economic and military potential. As published and revised, it should serve as a solid foundation for other appreciations or estimates as the need arises.

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14. This full estimate should not only reflect a thorough and critical approach to the available intelligence, but it must also be directed to face several new or different problems.

a. The period through 1955 has been chosen because current policy declarations indicate that the years from 1952 through 1955 are the most critical ones. In other words, we are entering a new phase, with Western military production and military strength beginning the slow rise to a position from which the West will be able to match Soviet military strength.

b. The central issue for this period will probably be the Soviet reaction to this growing power. The containment policy assumed that the growth of Allied strength and resolution would lead the Soviet leaders to realize that their possibilities for further expansion were blocked, that further aggression would probably lead to general war, which would devastate the Soviet state and probably dissolve the present rulers' grip upon their empire, and that they must therefore be reasonable and agree to negotiate. Once the Soviet juggernaut had been halted, internal pressures and dislocations might weaken the menace for us. As Western military strength grows, this thesis will be tested, but there is now less assurance that the Soviet leaders, when pressed, will agree to negotiate and, in effect, to submit to force. This assurance is undermined particularly by the estimated impact upon the USSR of the revival of German and Japanese military power and of changes in American foreign policy, which to the USSR probably appears aggressive. This leads, in other words, to the need for an estimate of the Soviet estimate of our intentions. That difficult estimate is vital because their courses of action will reflect increasingly their reaction to our policy.

c. Supplementary to this, we need an estimate of the Soviet definition of its vital or critical interests. It is probably unlikely now that any single action or decision of ours concerning issues such as German or Japanese rearmament, further development of American overseas air bases, a Southeast Asia Command, etc., would lead the Kremlin to go to war. We do need an examination of the total impact of all such actions upon the Kremlin and of the Kremlin's definition concerning the time at which the accumulated threat to its "vital interests" shall become unbearable.

d. Earlier estimates predicted that the USSR would probably be able by 1953 to neutralize the UK and to damage seriously the American war potential with mass weapons and that it might then decide to attempt that, regardless of the hazards involved in Western counter-action. This time is now approaching, and this estimate should be re-examined.

e. As more data becomes available, it becomes clearer that the Soviet scientific capability for research and development of weapons is

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roughly equal to ours and that there is no modern military weapon which the USSR cannot develop and produce, once the Kremlin has selected that weapon. The issue, then, is not the relative progressiveness of Soviet science or the relative maturity of the Soviet industrial system, but the Soviet decisions concerning allocation of scientific and industrial capabilities. We should have the scientists, economists, and the military cooperate to determine:

- i. Which weapons the Kremlin has decided and probably will decide to develop and produce.
- ii. What are the capabilities of the Soviet scientific and industrial system for developing and producing new weapons on a "hothouse" basis.
- iii. Why the Kremlin has decided to promote particular weapons.
- iv. What these decisions reveal concerning probable Soviet capabilities and courses of action.